

AB-6 - Paper

Soldiers' expectancies, implications for recruitment and job satisfaction.

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Introduction

The Royal Netherlands Army (RNLA) started recruiting professional soldiers as late as 1992. Up to that time the organization depended on enlisted men. In 1996 the last enlisted men left the army and since that time the RNLA depends on recruitment of young men and women. The image of the soldiers job is, we believe, an important predictor of intention to work for the army as a soldier (propensity). Therefor it is important to know what young people in the Netherlands think this job is like and how these expectancies are related to their behavior. Also expectancies about a job influence attrition and job satisfaction. This paper uses results of several studies to describe the image of the soldiers job and its effects on recruitment, early attrition and job satisfaction.

Theoretical background

The theory of rational decision making has been laid out in extenso by Vroom (1964). In short the theory states that choice for behavior depends on expected outcomes and the valences of such outcomes and the evaluation of the probability that the behavior will lead to the expected outcome.

Ajzen and Fishbein (1980) have elaborated on this model integrating not only beliefs about effects of behavior but also social norms of important other people, as well as external barriers possibly blocking (mediating) relations between intention and actual behavior. In respect to organizational choice Schneider (1995) presented the so called ASA cycle. This cycle consisting of Attraction, Selection, and Attrition describes why organizations tend to attract people that are like the people already in the organization, select those that resemble what they already have, and that people that do not fit leave the organizations very soon. Attraction is based on expected rewards of being an organization member.

The model

Based on these well accepted theories, it may be expected that a relationship exists between the image people have of the soldiers job (expectancies) and the propensity of working as a soldier. The relationship will be mediated by valences people attach to certain outcomes. Changes in propensity to work for the army may be related to changes in image of the army. Differences in propensity between categories of young people may be related to differences in the image of the soldiers' job.

Besides propensity, also attrition, job satisfaction and commitment may be related to the image of the soldiers' job. If expected outcomes are not met, dissatisfaction

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may be a result and attrition may follow.

This paper describes and combines outcomes of three recent studies, all conducted by the behavioral science division of the RNLA. This paper is mostly descriptive in nature and concerns the Dutch young peoples expectancies. However, the model as described applies to other organizations, and certainly other armies, as well.

The data

This paper uses data from three studies conducted by the behavioral sciences department of the RNLA. In the construction of questionnaires the same theoretical framework was used. However the primary goals of the studies were not measuring the soldiers jobs' image. The data were used for other purposes that will be described in short.

General population: propensity to work for the army

The first study used, was a nation wide recruitment study (GW docno 98-39). Data were gathered through face to face interviews in a representative sample ($n=1013$) of Dutch young people (14 to 27 years old). Amongst other things, respondents were asked about what they thought important in choosing a job and about their image of the soldiers' job. The job image was measured through 58 items describing aspects of a job, respondents were asked whether these items applied to the soldiers job. Also respondents were asked their opinion about typical military activities. Goal of this study was to find measures to increase propensity.

New recruits: early attrition

The second study was conducted amongst new recruits (GW docno. 98-35). Data were gathered in three measurement rounds and several initial training units. Respondents were asked what they expected of their new job. The primary goal of this study was to find ways to decrease early attrition. Only data from the first measurement round (day one of initial training) are used here.

Active duty: expectations satisfaction

The third source of data is the permanent soldiers satisfaction study that is continually conducted among soldiers in active duty (not in training). The main goal of this study is to measure and explain (changes in) job satisfaction. Outcomes are reported quarterly at several organizational levels (brigades, division, army corps) and used as indicators in the Commander in chiefs personnel monitor. In the questionnaire for this study, soldiers are asked if there are any unmet expectations, and if so what these are about.

Results

First the results of each of the three studies will be described.

General population

58 Items were used to measure the image of the soldiers job among Dutch Youth. Table 1 shows the percentages of young people that believe the aspect described, applies to the soldiers job. Several items have a large proportion of people that answer 'Maybe' or 'Don't know'. Such items reflect a vague image of the soldiers job. Table 1 also shows how many percent of young people find the aspect mentioned important when considering a job (in general).

Multiple regression analyses show that the attitude towards military activities is the best predictor of propensity. Image of the job and valences in job choice (see table 1) predict this attitude towards military activities.

Table 1

Image of the soldiers' job in the Dutch population (14-27 years) and valences of items in general (%)

<i>Aspect of the job</i>	<i>in soldiers job</i>	<i>maybe in soldiers job</i>	<i>important in general</i>
working with colleagues	92%	4%	80%
work in a team	90%	8%	71%
physical	88%	8%	32%
possibilities for education and training	88%	8%	71%
discipline	86%	10%	64%
outdoors	87%	9%	5%
sports	85%	11%	5%
high demands	83%	10%	31%
get dirty	83%	12%	5%
modern equipment	83%	15%	66%
<i>Aspect of the job</i>	<i>in soldiers job</i>	<i>maybe in soldiers job</i>	<i>important in general</i>
strict 'control'	81%	11%	17%
you learn from your work	81%	13%	91%
exciting and adventurous	80%	16%	62%
manual work	79%	16%	57%
diversity	79%	14%	88%
precise work	78%	17%	52%
promotion	78%	15%	77%

see the world	76%	19%	51%
working with different people	70%	22%	37%
develop personality	69%	22%	86%
interesting work	67%	21%	96%
supportive leaders	65%	27%	75%
important for society	64%	22%	55%
convivial	62%	30%	97%
nice colleagues	61%	34%	98%
tangible results	55%	28%	86%
appreciation by colleagues	55%	35%	74%
working under time pressure	55%	31%	17%
noisy	54%	31%	4%
technical work	53%	34%	25%
steady job	49%	31%	90%
appreciation by leaders	48%	41%	87%
good living and working circumstances	46%	36%	96%
better chances for future jobs	45%	34%	83%
initiative	44%	33%	85%
status in society	40%	38%	43%
extra rewards for good work	38%	33%	76%
no permanent commitment	36%	29%	28%
sociable leaders	34%	50%	93%
decide for yourself	34%	27%	63%
autonomy	33%	35%	86%
health risks	30%	42%	3%
time for private life	27%	37%	95%
fixed working hours	25%	22%	51%
nothing to do sometimes	24%	29%	8%
safe work	22%	27%	76%
do work your own way	21%	28%	82%
close to home	20%	20%	63%
decide about workspace	17%	22%	65%
decide about holidays	14%	24%	69%
be with family and friends	12%	28%	62%
take it easy	11%	16%	34%
traveltime within 30 minutes	10%	22%	50%

In the eyes of the general population, the soldiers' job is a challenging job in which you work outdoors in a team, have physical challenges, discipline and high demands. Furthermore, there are possibilities for education and training.

Regarding some aspects of the job many young people 'don't know'. These aspects are sociable leaders and nice colleagues, time for private life and health risks. On these subjects no clear image of the soldiers job exists in Dutch society. Some of the images mentioned are considered very important with respect to job choice (last column table 1). This suggests that the image on such items may differentiate between people with positive attitudes towards the military and the rest.

New recruits

New recruits have chosen for the army and have been selected. Some differences between their image of the soldiers' job and that of the general population may be expected. At the same time it is not surprising that on certain aspects, new recruits do not have clear-cut expectations Table 2 shows new recruits' expectancies of the soldiers' job.

Table 2

Expectations of new recruit on day one of initial training

The soldiers job offers:	Yes	No	Maybe
comradeship	99%	1%	1%
teamwork	98%	1%	1%
make new friends	96%	1%	3%
discipline	97%	1%	2%
frequent sports	96%	0%	4%
challenging	96%	2%	2%
stretch my borders	96%	1%	3%
working together with all kinds of people	95%	1%	4%
help people in need	95%	1%	5%
much work experience	93%	2%	6%
diversity	93%	1%	6%
adventurous	90%	1%	9%
being send abroad	90%	1%	9%
strict	89%	1%	10%
frequent maneuvers , exercises	87%	1%	12%
physically challenging	86%	2%	12%
adequate pay	82%	2%	16%
pleasant and instructive	81%	2%	18%
a leader where I can address my questions	79%	1%	20%
the job I really want	79%	2%	20%
better chances for future jobs	74%	2%	24%
possibilities to start a life time career	67%	4%	28%
adequate travel-money	66%	10%	24%
enough time for civil education	66%	5%	29%
an understanding and social leader	66%	0%	34%
sufficient leisure opportunities	51%	8%	41%
step by step training	51%	19%	31%
time for private life	40%	22%	38%
not to difficult	27%	17%	55%

The new recruits expect without doubt, to be working in a team, make new friends and find comradeship. Furthermore it is clear to them that it will be (physically) challenging with lots of sports and discipline. In these fields they do not differ from youth in general. Recruits in general react in a positive manner. They assent in large numbers to almost all items. Subject many recruits do not know about are again time for private life and sociable leaders.

The expectations as measured in this study are not directly related to attrition. They are however moderately related to (continuance) commitment.

As compared to the general population, recruits seem more homogenous in their answers.

Soldiers satisfaction study

In the permanent soldiers satisfaction study soldiers are asked what aspects of their job are not as they expected. It was found that unmet expectations are strongly related to job satisfaction and commitment. Also intention to leave the army is affected by these variables.

It can be assumed that complaints about unmet expectations partly shed light on the kind of expectations these soldiers had.

A little less than one third of all respondents indicate they have some unmet expectations. Analyses (multiple regression) show that job satisfaction is predicted by leadership behavior (beta .42) and expectancies (beta .26) and age (beta -.12) (GW docno 98-30).

Table 3 (un)met expectations among soldiers in active duty.

Expectations met?	%
Completely as expected	8%
mostly as expected	64%
hardly as expected	20%
not at all	8%

Which expectations were not met is shown in the following table

Table 4

Aspects in which the job differs from expectations

Theme	Times mentioned	Percentage of respondents
work contents	219	32%
promises made (recruitment)	100	15%
function	67	10%
leadership behavior	66	10%
housing	60	9%
discipline (more or strict)	50	7%
organization	49	7%
treatment (social)	38	6%
career perspective	38	6%
more physical sports	35	5%
pay	27	4%
military training	24	4%
civilian education	23	3%
peace keeping	26	4%
colleagues (atmosphere)	22	3%
colleagues level	21	3%
leave and working time	15	2%
driving / license	13	2%
appreciation	9	1%
materials/uniform	7	1%
work environment	4	1%
uncertainties	6	1%
leadership	6	1%
general remarks	47	7%

Most answers are about the work contents, the active soldiers feel there is not as much work as they had expected. Furthermore the work is not physically tough enough, not exciting enough. They had expected more variety, f.e. maneuvers and more sports.

Also remarks are made (15%) about promises made but not kept by 'the organization'.

One in 10 is more or less disappointed in the way they are treated by their direct leaders. Mostly soldiers feel they are treated as little children with no feeling of responsibility and as if they lack motivation ("we are treated as if we were enlisted men").

These answers suggest that the soldiers expected the reverse: variety, much sports, a lot of physical challenging work and being treated as a responsible and

motivated colleague. Furthermore, soldiers expect the 'organization' to give them fair treatment, not breaking or making promises.

Conclusions

The soldiers' job has a clear image in some fields and a vague image in others. The image is clear about it being a job in which one works in a team, encounters challenges, discipline, high demands and lots of physical activity. Young people in general expect this, new recruits expect this and soldiers in active duty indicate (sometimes) this is what they miss. Living up to these expectations will lead to more satisfied personnel.

Expectations are vague about the nature of the leader. Young people and new recruits have no idea what to expect. This may be considered an opportunity for recruitment. Creating an image of 'good leaders' (feed-back, sociable and amiable) will make the job more attractive. Image alone, off course, is not enough. The actual leadership behavior will have to match this image.

Discussion

The three studies described above indicate that expectations play an important role in recruitment and job satisfaction.

We believe the results show that the model applied is a promising one, although some improvements can be made. It is important to use the right level of abstraction when describing expectations in questionnaire items. Furthermore it is important to find a balance between positive and negative expectations. Furthermore, in crucial areas like leadership behavior and autonomy, the expectations might be measured and dealt with at a more detailed level.

Though the actual content of the soldiers' job image may differ across countries the process of decision making will be the same. Therefor the mechanism behind the study is applicable in other countries as well.

With regard to early attrition no clear relationship with expectation was found. Perhaps early attrition is not so much explained by disappointment with regard to expectations but more by external factors (homefront etc.). Though job satisfaction and commitment, expectations do influence attrition among soldiers in active duty.

Becoming a soldier is not only dependent on psychological process of job choice. Also sociological influences (job market) play a role. Thus, it will never be possible to explain fully why one individual joins the army and another does not. Still results show part of the variance in the populations can be explained.

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